

## DESCRIPTION OF A NEW SPECIES OF SRI LANKAN LITTER SKINK (SQUAMATA: SCINCIDAE: *LANKASCINCUS*)

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### ABSTRACT

*Lankascincus greeri*, a new species of litter skink, is described from Sri Lanka. The new species, which is widely distributed throughout the rainforests of the south-western lowlands, is distinguished from all other members of this genus by the presence of paired frontoparietals; possessing 2 secondary temporals in contact with each other; and by having 42–45 paravertebrals, 18–21 subdigital lamellae on fourth digit of pes and a maximum SVL of 58.5 mm. A paratype of *Sphenomorphus dorsicatenatus* is rediscovered (the type series having long been considered lost) and assigned to *Lankascincus*.

**Key words:** Reptilia, *Sphenomorphus*, endemism, Ceylon, Lygosominae

### INTRODUCTION

In a review of the Sri Lankan members of the lygosomine skinks previously assigned to *Sphenomorphus* Fitzinger, 1843, Greer (1991) made available the new genus *Lankascincus*, in which he included three previously described species (*L. deignani*, *L. fallax*, *L. taprobanensis*) while adding three new ones (*L. deraniyagalae*, *L. gansi* and *L. taylori*). Two further species, *L. munindradasai* and *L. sripadensis*, were added to *Lankascincus* recently by Wickramasinghe *et al.* (2007), from the highlands of Sri Lanka. The genus *Lankascincus* is presently considered endemic to Sri Lanka.

A national survey of lizards in Sri Lanka was conducted by the Wildlife Heritage Trust between 1998 and 2005. This survey while serving to delineate the ranges of known species and assess their conservation status also led to the discovery of new taxa. Here, using a morphological approach, we describe a new species of *Lankascincus* that was discovered in the course of this survey, in the island's lowland rainforests. The review of historical material associated with this study also led to the rediscovery of a paratype of *Sphenomorphus dorsicatenatus* Deraniyagala, 1953, in the National Museum of Sri Lanka, which was found to be a valid and extant species of *Lankascincus*.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methods for meristic data follow Andreone and Greer (2002); measurements were made using an Olympus SZ40 dissecting microscope. Head length (measured from snout tip to posterior margin of ear opening), eye diameter (greatest diameter of eye), and external ear opening (greatest length of ear opening), were measured to the nearest 0.1 mm using KWB dial Vernier callipers. The following measurements were taken to the nearest 0.5 mm using a steel ruler: snout-vent length (SVL, from tip of snout to anterior margin of vent); tail length (from anterior margin of vent to tip of unregenerated tail); trunk length (from axilla to groin); forelimb length (from forelimb insertion to tip of fourth finger, excluding claw); hind-limb length (from hind-limb insertion to tip of fourth toe, excluding claw).

A Canon IXUS 50 digital camera was used for colour photography. Descriptions of colour in preservative are based on freshly-preserved examples.

Comparisons were made with preserved material in the collection of Natural History Museum, London, England (BMNH); National Museum of Sri Lanka, Colombo, Sri Lanka (NMSL); and Wildlife Heritage Trust of Sri Lanka (WHT). Additional sources of information include Deraniyagala (1931, 1953), Taylor (1950), and Greer (1991).

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Altitudes are given in metres above mean sea level; geographic co-ordinates were taken using topographic maps (1 inch: 1 mile, Survey Department, Colombo) and in some instances, with a Magellan 12-channel GPS (geodetic datum WGS-84: World Geodetic System, 1984). Specimens collected in the course of this study are deposited in NMSL and WHT.

Comparative material examined in this study is listed in the Appendix.

## RESULTS

### *Lankascincus greeri* **Batuwita & Pethiyagoda, sp. nov.**

(Figures 1a, b & 2; Tables 1 & 2; Plate 1)

#### Holotype

WHT 6524 (adult male), 52.0 mm SVL, Kombala-Kottawa Forest Reserve near Hiyaré, Galle (Southern Province), 06°04'N, 80°15'E, 60 m, 04 April, 2003, coll. S. Batuwita.

#### Paratypes

NMSL uncatalogued (1 male), 41.5 mm SVL, same location data as holotype, coll. S. Batuwita, A. Alagiyawadu and P. Wickramatilake, 09 March, 2003; WHT 6525 (1 male), 58.5 mm SVL, same location data as holotype, coll. S. Batuwita, 08 April, 2003; WHT 6527 (1 male), 48.0 mm SVL, Beraliya

Forest Reserve near Elpitiya (Southern Province), 06°15'N, 80°12'E, 80 m, coll. M. M. Bahir and S. Batuwita, 07 November, 1998; WHT 6526, (1 male) 51.0 mm SVL, Koskulana, Sinharaja World Heritage Site (Sabaragamuwa Province), 06°25'N, 80°27'E, 460m, coll. D. Gabadage, 24 January, 1996.

#### Diagnosis

Males distinguished from those of all other species of *Lankascincus* by a combination of the following characters: prefrontals in contact or narrowly separate; frontoparietals paired; supraciliaries, 10 or 11; a single primary temporal; secondary temporals, 2, in contact; supralabials, 7; post-supralabials, 2; paravertebrals, 42–45; ventrals, 55–59; transverse scale rows across mid-body, 26–28; subdigital lamellae on fourth digit of manus, 13–15, pes, 18–21; a 'parietal eye' present at posterior angle of interparietal; maximum SVL, 58.5 mm; general body colour (in life) yellowish-brown; males lack a dorso-lateral stripe.

#### Details of holotype

Supraciliaries, 11; transverse scale rows across mid-body, 28; paravertebrals, 45; ventral scales, 59; SVL, 52.0 mm; tail (including regenerated portion), 71.5 mm; forelimb length 29.8% of SVL, hind-limb length 42.3% of SVL; subdigital lamellae beneath fourth digit of manus, 14, pes, 20 or 21.

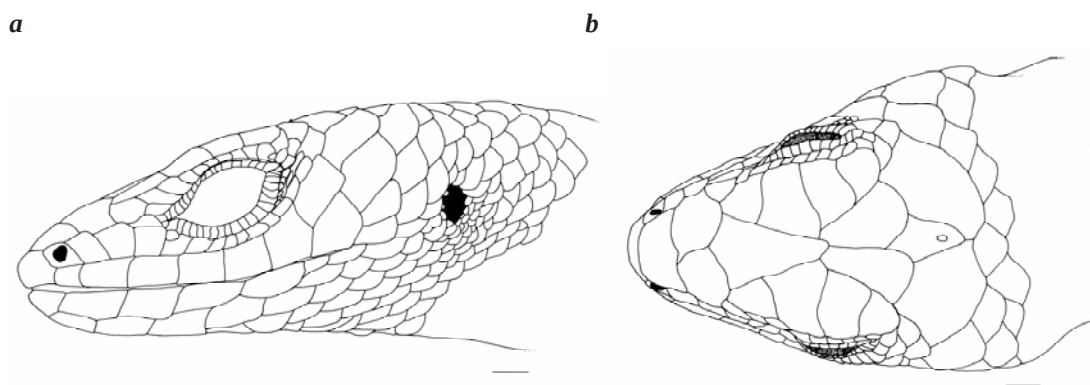


Figure 1. (a) Lateral and (b) Dorsal aspects of head of *Lankascincus greeri*. WHT 6524, holotype, male, 52.0 mm SVL. (scale bars: 1 mm).

**Table 1. Meristics of holotype and 4 paratypes of *Lankascincus greeri*.**

|                                     | Range   |
|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Mid-body scales                     | 26 – 28 |
| Ventral scales                      | 55 – 59 |
| Paravertebral scales                | 42 – 45 |
| Supraciliary scales                 | 10 – 11 |
| Digit IV subdigital lamellae: manus | 14 – 15 |
| Digit IV subdigital lamellae: pes   | 19 – 21 |

**Description**

Head moderately short (head length 23.2–25.5% of SVL). Snout obtuse in dorsal view, pointed in lateral view; rostral scale visible in dorsal view; supranasals absent; frontonasal wider than long; prefrontals contiguous; frontal subtriangular; supraoculars, 4, the first and second in contact with frontal; first supraocular in contact with first three supraciliaries; frontoparietals paired, in contact with second, third and fourth supraoculars; an interparietal eye-spot present; parietals posteriorly in contact with each other behind interparietal; nuchals undifferentiated (Tables 1 & 2 and Figs. 1a & b).

Nasal larger than nostrils; postnasals absent; loreals, 2, the posterior one larger than the anterior. Preoculars, 2; supraciliaries 10 or 11, in a continuous row, the first one in contact with prefrontal and first supraocular, the last one projecting onto supraocular shelf; pretemporals 2, both in contact with parietal; suboculars 9, in a complete row, the last one in contact with primary temporal; lower eyelid moveable, scaly; primary temporals, 1 (transversely-divided in some individuals); secondary temporals 2, in contact with each other, the upper one smaller, anteriorly in contact with lower pretemporal, overlapped superiorly by parietal; supralabials 7, the fifth beneath level of centre of eye; post-supralabials 2. External ear opening 18.1–31.8% of eye diameter, oval, with short, broad, pointed lobes anteriorly, shorter and of variable length around rest of auricular rim.

Mental and postmentals wider than long, in contact with first infralabial only; infralabials 5; pairs of enlarged chin shields 3, the first in contact with each other, the second and third separated by a single row of scales (the third also

separated from infralabials by a single scale row).

Body moderately long (trunk length 52.9–55.8% of SVL; Tables 1, 2). Scales cycloid; transverse scale rows across mid-body, 26–28; paravertebrals 42–45, those on anterior half wider than those on posterior half; ventrals, 55–59; inner preanals overlap outer ones. SVL, 41.5–58.5 mm; 3.9–4.3 times head length (Tables 1 & 2); unregenerated tail length 1.7–2.0 times SVL (2 ex.).

Limbs well-developed, pentadactyl; forelimb length 29.1–30.1% of SVL, hind-limb length 38.2–43.4% (Tables 1 & 2); subdigital lamellae beneath fourth digit of manus, 13–15, pes, 18–21.

**Colouration**

In life (Plate 1), ground colour yellowish brown; head with a series of pale spots dorsally; prominent white spots laterally on neck; a distinct white blotch present beneath eye; tail reddish, with blackish, interrupted longitudinal lines at base. In preservative, dorsally light brown, becoming progressively paler on sides and venter. Interrupted dark longitudinal lines present on dorsum, prominent on base of tail; similar lines well-defined on hind-limbs. Supralabials and infralabials with black spots.

**Etymology**

The species is named for Allen E. Greer of the Australian Museum, Sydney, in recognition of his many contributions to the taxonomy of Scincidae. The name is Latinized as a noun in the genitive singular case.



**Plate 1.** Holotype of *Lankascincus greeri* (male). WHT 6524, 52.0 mm SVL.

**Table 2.** Proportional morphometry of the holotype and 4 paratypes of *Lankascincus greeri*.

|                                 | Range       | Mean | S.D. |
|---------------------------------|-------------|------|------|
| SVL (mm)                        | 41.5 – 58.5 | 50.2 | 6.2  |
| Head length (% of SVL)          | 23.2 – 25.5 | 24.5 | 0.9  |
| Tail length (% of SVL)          | 1.5 – 2.1   | 1.7  | 0.3  |
| SVL/ head length                | 3.9 – 4.3   | 4.1  | 0.1  |
| Trunk length (% of SVL)         | 52.9 – 55.8 | 54.4 | 0.1  |
| Forelimb length (% of SVL)      | 29.1 – 30.1 | 29.5 | 0.4  |
| Hind-limb length (% of SVL)     | 38.2 – 43.4 | 41.0 | 2.1  |
| Ear length (% of head length)   | 7.5 – 10.3  | 8.9  | 1.9  |
| Eye diameter (% of head length) | 32.4 – 34.0 | 33.2 | 1.1  |
| Ear length / eye diameter (%)   | 18.2 – 36.8 | 27.6 | 7.3  |

#### **Distribution and natural history**

*Lankascincus greeri* is widely distributed among the forested areas of south-western Sri Lanka, including the Sinharaja World Heritage Site, Kanneliya Forest Reserve, Kombala-Kottawa Forest Reserve and Beraliya Forest Reserve (Fig. 2). It is restricted to lower elevations (< ~ 500 m).

Individuals of *L. greeri* were observed in leaf litter and under large stones. It is a relatively rare

species, hitherto known from only the five specimens of the type series, which comprise four males and a juvenile (sex not determined). *Lankascincus greeri* occurs in sympatry with two congeners (*L. fallax* and *L. gansi*), and the skinks *Eutropis carinata lankae* and *E. macularius macularius*.



**Figure 2. Distribution of *Lankascincus greeri* in southwestern Sri Lanka. (solid symbol indicates type locality).**

## DISCUSSION

In establishing the genus *Lankascincus*—based on an examination of the relevant types—Greer (1991) recognized only two junior synonyms: *Lygosoma punctatolineatum* (= *L. taprobanensis*) and *Sphenomorphus rufogulus* (= *L. fallax*). We are confident that the new species described herein is conspecific with neither of these older names. *Lankascincus greeri* differs from *L. taprobanensis* by having 7 (vs 6) supralabials, 42–45 (vs 54–64) paravertebrals and 18–21 (vs 11–13) subdigital lamellae beneath fourth digit of pes; and from *Lankascincus fallax* by having paired (vs fused) frontoparietals and a single (vs 2) primary temporals.

Although Greer (1991) and Austin *et al.* (2004) considered *Sphenomorphus dorsicatenatus* Deraniyagala, 1953 (type locality Angamana, near Nivitigala) to be a species *incertae sedis*, they tentatively assigned it to *Lankascincus*. The types of this species have long been considered lost (Greer, 1991). In the course of this study, one of the paratypes was discovered during a search of materials in the collection of the NMSL. *Sphenomorphus dorsicatenatus* is distinguished from *L. greeri* by having the secondary temporals separated by the upper primary temporal (vs secondary temporals in contact) and possessing only a single (vs 2)

post-supralabials. We consider it to be a valid species, widely distributed in the lowland rainforests of Sri Lanka (e.g., Sinharaja, Kottawa, Kanneliya and Beraliya). A related but distinct and as yet undescribed species occurs in the environs of Kandy, a description of which, together with an analysis of the inter-relationships of *Lankascincus*, is presently in preparation (work in progress).

The only other lygosomine species *incertae sedis* from Sri Lanka is *Lygosoma megalops* Annandale, 1906, the types of which are evidently lost (Deraniyagala, 1953; Greer, 1991). The original description, however, is sufficiently detailed for this species to be distinguished from the new species described herein. *Lankascincus greeri* differs from '*Lygosoma*' *megalops* by having the parietals posteriorly in contact with each other, 7 supralabials, and 10 or 11 supraciliaries (vs parietals clearly separated by interparietal, 6 supralabials, and 7 or 8 supraciliaries in '*Lygosoma*' *megalops*).

Deraniyagala (1931, 1953) recorded *Lygosoma dussumieri* Duméril & Bibron, 1839 (type locality 'Malabar', i.e., the south-western littoral of India, now in Kerala State), from Peradeniya, near Kandy, in central Sri Lanka. While the lack of surviving voucher material precludes verification of this record, Deraniyagala's description allows separation of that taxon from the new species herein described by the number of mid-body scale rows: *Lankascincus greeri* has 26–28, whereas the Sri Lankan '*Lygosoma*' *dussumieri* was noted by Deraniyagala (1931) to have 38–40.

From among its (Sri Lankan) congeners, *L. greeri* is distinguished from *L. deignani* and *L. deraniyagalae* in having 42–45 paravertebrals (vs 51–55 and 50–55, respectively); and from *L. fallax* by the presence of paired (vs fused) frontoparietals. Further, it differs from *L. gansi*, *L. taprobanensis* and *L. taylori* by having 18–21 (vs 11–16) subdigital lamellae on fourth digit of pes. It is distinguished from *L. dorsicatenatus* in having the secondary temporals in contact (vs separated by upper primary temporal) and 2 (vs 1) post-supralabials. In addition, *L. greeri* differs from *L. munindradasai* by having the prefrontals in contact (vs widely separated); supralabials, 7 (vs 6); paravertebrals, 42–45 (vs 53 or 54); subdigital lamellae on fourth digit of pes, 18–21 (vs 11 or 12); and from *L. sripadensis* by



possessing 42–45 paravertebrals (vs 51–53); and 18–21 lamellae under fourth digit of pes (vs 17–19).

While *L. greeri* occurs in anthropogenic habitats, it appears to depend on a high degree of shade and leaf litter and is uncommon or altogether absent in highly disturbed habitats (unlike, e.g., the almost synanthropic *L. fallax*). The reduction and elimination of leaf litter and forest undergrowth that inevitably accompanies deforestation (Andreone and Greer, 2004) could, therefore, impact on this species. Widespread burning continues to devastate significant extents of secondary forest in Sri Lanka each year (Batuwita and Bahir, 2005), posing further threats to ground-dwelling species.

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## APPENDIX

## Comparative material

***Lankascincus deignani* (Taylor, 1950):** WHT 5416, 5417, WHT 6566, WHT 6568, 4 ex., Agra Arboretum, Agarapatana, 06°51'N, 80°41'E, 1550 m; WHT 6569, 1 ex., garden near Nanu Oya Railway Station, 06°56'30''N, 80°44'30''E, 1623 m; WHT 6567, 1 ex., Dimbula-Patana, 06°57'N, 80°38'E, 1220 m; WHT 2013, 6 ex., Moray Estate, Rajamallay, 06°48'N, 80°31'E, 1370 m; WHT 6739, 1 ex., Bogawantalawa-Balangoda Road near Udugama, 06°44'N, 80°41'E, 810 m.

***Lankascincus deraniyagalae* Greer, 1991:** BMNH 95.7.23.28C (holotype), BMNH 95.7.23.28B (paratype), Pundul Oya, Ceylon.

***Lankascincus dorsicatenatus* (Deraniyagala, 1953):** NMSL uncatalogued (paratype), 'Rammalkada'; WHT 6580, WHT 6600, 2 ex., Beraliya Forest Reserve near Elpitiya, 06°15'N, 80°12'E, 80 m; WHT 6590, WHT 6604, WHT 6645, 3 ex., Kombala-Kottawa Forest Reserve, 06°06'N, 80°20'E, 60 m; WHT 6658, 1 ex., Hiyaré, near Galle, 06°04'N, 80°15'E, 60 m; WHT 6581, WHT 6591, WHT 6595, WHT 6599, WHT 6651, 5 ex., Nawinna, near Galle, 06°04'N, 80°12'E, 5 m; WHT 6656, 1 ex., Kanneliya, 06°15'N, 80°20'E, 150 m; WHT 6583, WHT 6610, 2 ex., Dediyaigala, 06°10'N, 80°26'E, 150 m; WHT 6632, WHT 6633, 2 ex., Udugama, 06°14'N, 80°20'E, 150 m; WHT 6737, WHT 6745, 2 ex., Koskulana, Sinharaja, 06°25'N, 80°27'E, 460 m.

***Lankascincus fallax* (Peters, 1860):** WHT 6601, WHT 6606, 2 ex., Kandewatta, 06°23'N, 80°12'E, 2 m; WHT 6643, 1 ex., Boossa, 06°05'15''N, 80°09'45''E, 2 m; WHT 6605, WHT 6647, WHT 6654, 3 ex., Nawinna, 06°04'N, 80°12'E, 5 m; WHT 6602, WHT 6674, 2 ex., Gonapinuwa, near Galle, 06°09'N, 80°08'E, 20 m; WHT 6603, 1 ex., Kombala-Kottawa, 06°06'N, 80°20'E, 60 m; WHT 6662, 1 ex., Welipitimodera, Gintota, 06°04'N, 80°11'E, 10 m; WHT 6700, 1 ex., Pussellawa, 07°05'N, 80°30'E, 900 m; WHT 6556, 1 ex., Penideniya, near Peradeniya, 07°15'N, 80°35'E, 450 m; WHT 6564, 1 ex., Wattedgama, 07°20'N, 80°40'E, 400 m; WHT 6560, 1 ex., Pundul Oya, 07°01'19''N, 80°39'59''E, 1100 m; WHT 6557, 1 ex., Pallegama, 07°32'N, 80°49'E, 185 m; WHT 6561-63, 3 ex., Kalahagala, near Polonnaruwa, 07°52'N, 80°56'E, 60 m; WHT 6634, 1 ex., Kodagoda, near Imaduwa, 06°02'N,

80°23'E, 60 m; WHT 6558, WHT 6631, WHT 6635, 3 ex., Udugama, 06°14'N, 80°20'E, 150 m; WHT 6551-55, 5 ex., Kotagala, 06°55'54''N, 80°37'17''E, 1229 m; WHT 6550, 1 ex., Dimbula, near Talawakele, 06°57'N, 80°38'E, 1220 m; WHT 6559, 1 ex., Kombala-Kottawa, Hiyaré, 06°04'N, 80°15'E, 60 m.

***Lankascincus gansi* Greer, 1991:** WHT 6655, WHT 6672, 2 ex., Kombala-Kottawa, Galle, 06°06'N, 80°20'E, 60 m; WHT 6588, WHT 6607, WHT 6597, 3 ex., Kanneliya, Galle, 06°15'N, 80°20'E, 150 m; WHT 6776-78, 3 ex., Nawinna, near Galle, 06°04'N, 80°12'E, 5 m; WHT 6575, WHT 6592, WHT 6667, 3 ex., Beraliya Forest Reserve, near Elpitiya, 06°15'N, 80°12'E, 80 m; WHT 6593, WHT 6720, WHT 6743, 3 ex., Morningside, Rakwana, 06°25'10''N, 80° 36'30''E, 850 m; WHT 6666, WHT 6688, 2 ex., Dediyaigala, near Akuressa, 06°10'N, 80°26'E, 150 m; WHT 6661, WHT 6676, 2 ex., Kombala-Kottawa, Hiyaré, 06°04'N, 80°15'E, 60 m; WHT 6576, 1 ex., Rummassala, near Galle, 06°01'N, 80°14'E, 10 m; WHT 6613, 1 ex., Pitawala, near Kitulgala, 06°59'.518'N, 80°27'.428'E, 345 m; WHT 6612, 1 ex., Kitulgala, 06°59'31''N, 80° 27'26''E, 345 m; WHT 6712, WHT 6715, WHT 6718, 3 ex., Pundul Oya, 07°01'19''N, 80°39'59''E, 1100 m; WHT 6611, 1 ex., Ambegamuwa, 07°01'N, 80°29'E, 762 m; WHT 6780, 1 ex. Gannoruwa, near Peradeniya, 07°17'10''N, 80°35' 30''E, 700 m.

***Lankascincus munindradasai* Wickramasinghe, Rodrigo, Dayawansa and Jayantha, 2007:** NMSL20072101, NMSL20072102; holotype and paratype, respectively; Peak Wilderness Sanctuary, Nuwara Eliya, 06°48'24.63''N, 080° 30'41.21''N, 1825 m.

***Lankascincus sripadensis* Wickramasinghe, Rodrigo, Dayawansa and Jayantha, 2007:** NMSL200705001, NMSL200705003; holotype and a paratype, respectively; Peak Wilderness Sanctuary, Nuwara Eliya, 06°48'24.63''N, 080° 30'41.21''N, 1825 m.

***Lankascincus taprobanensis* (Kelaart, 1854):** WHT 2014, 6 ex., WHT 6571, 6572, 2 ex., Horton Plains, 06°48'N, 80°48'E, 2150 m; WHT 1509, 1 ex., Namunukula, Badulla, 06°56'N, 81°07'E, 1900 m; WHT 6573, 1 ex., Loolcondera Estate, near Galaha, 07° 08'N, 80° 42'E, 1250 m; WHT 6570, 1 ex., Hakgala, 06°55'N, 80°49'E, 1830 m; WHT 6596, 1 ex., Agra-Bopaththalawa, 06°50'N, 80°40'E, 1700m.

***Lankascincus taylori* Greer, 1991:** WHT 6699, Tonacombe Estate, Badulla, 06°52'N, 81°07'E, 1320 m; WHT 6614–18, 5 ex., Madakumbura, near Pundul Oya, 07°00'N, 80°38'E, 1050 m; WHT 6707, WHT 6717, WHT 6713, WHT 6716, 4 ex., Pundul Oya, 07°01'19''N, 80°39'59''E, 1100 m; WHT 6675, WHT 6680, WHT 6693, WHT 6704, 4 ex., Gannoruwa Forest Reserve, near Peradeniya, 07°17'10''N, 80°35'30''E, 700 m; WHT 6640, WHT 6781, 2 ex., Hantana, near Peradeniya, 07°14'30''N,

80°37'E, 762 m; WHT 6687, WHT 6694, 2 ex., Penideniya, near Peradeniya, 07°15'N, 80°35'E, 450 m; WHT 6702, WHT 6705, 2 ex., Pussellawa, 07°05'N, 80°30'E, 900 m; WHT 6703, 1 ex., Peradeniya, 07°15'30''N, 80°35'40''E, 450 m; WHT 6695, 1 ex., Loolcondera Estate, near Galaha, 07°08'N, 80°42'E, 1250 m; WHT 6786, 5237, 2 ex., Dolukanda, near Ibbagamuwa, 07°38'N, 80°25'E, 450 m.